

Critics: Water plan all wet

New rules offer no benefits for the north state, they say

Tim Hearden  
Record Searchlight

A government plan for meeting California's future water demands offers nothing for the north state but more regulations and a possible loss of land-use control, two rural counties' advocates said Tuesday.

The CALFED Bay-Delta Program, introduced June 9 by Gov. Gray Davis and U.S. Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, would be an \$8 billion, 30-year effort that calls for conserving water, protecting fish and enlarging dams, including Shasta Dam by six feet.

But none of the approximately 300,000 acre-feet of new water from mountain snowpack that would be stored in Lake Shasta is for California's far northern counties, said Kay Bryan of Fort Jones, a Siskiyou County supervisor and water committee chairwoman for the Regional Council of Rural Counties.

Furthermore, the proposal would rob local governments of control over ground water in their communities and heap mounds of new regulations on the timber and agriculture industries, said Michael Jackson, a Quincy attorney who specializes in water and the environment.

"I have to tell you there's nothing in there for the north state except for problems, more problems and a lot of money to watch them evolve," Bryan said. "We are not in the solution area. However, 80 percent of the solution comes from here."

Bryan and Jackson asked Shasta County supervisors Tuesday to help prevent the CALFED plan from being implemented by the Legislature, Congress and government agencies.

Bryan said she is "frightened" by a proposed change in the state Constitution that would give a state agency the right to approve or deny land uses based on how water on or under the property is distributed.

Legislation will be introduced this year or next year that will reverse a law that prohibits export of ground water from the Sacramento-Sierra ground water basin, Jackson said.

"Ground water has always been the property of the landowner, with the idea that water can be used for the benefit of the land," Jackson said.

Jackson also warned of new drinking water standards that could be in place by 2006, requiring farmers to improve drainage systems and imposing scores of new rules and regulations on the timber industry.

The framework unveiled by Davis and Babbitt is the latest landmark in a rocky existence for CALFED, a coalition of state and federal agencies formed several years ago and charged with cleaning up the San Francisco Bay Delta environment and providing Californians with a reliable water supply.

The latest plan has come under fire for exempting Southern California and San Joaquin Valley water users from federal regulations by allowing them to divert water no matter how many fish die as a result, Jackson said.

U.S. Rep. Wally Herger, R-Marysville, called the plan "an assault on Northern California" and "the height of bureaucratic and political cowardice," explaining that the document leaves the door open for a Peripheral Canal-type diversion project to carry Northern California's water south.

But state Sen. Maurice Johannessen and Assemblyman Dick Dickerson, both Redding Republicans who attended the announcement by Davis and Babbitt, were more gentle in their critiques of the proposal.

Dickerson said the prospect of raising Shasta Dam is "worthy of consideration," and added that he'd like to see more serious consideration of building the off-stream, above-ground Sites Reservoir in Colusa County to provide more water storage.

Johannessen, who chairs the Senate Oversight Committee on CALFED, said he's disappointed there's no "area of origin" protection for Northern California water and property owners. He pledged to "safeguard our water and property rights" as the committee chairman.

"Unfortunately, this plan gives very little, if anything, to Northern California, while giving the south state nearly everything," Johannessen said. "Quite frankly, some changes need to be made."

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